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INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1690
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0317
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0216
RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME 0012
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0016
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000862

SIPDIS
AIDAC
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DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, EEB/TPP/MTAA/ABT, AND AF/PDPA
PLS PASS USAID/AFR/WA NFREEMAN, LDOORES-FENDELL, GBERTOLIN
OFDA/W FOR ACONVERY, CCHAN, FSHANKS, MSHIRLEY, JMCINTOSH
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SUBJECT: Niger: Food Insecurity Disaster Alert

Ref: Niamey 00813

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¶1. (U) Summary: This message provides an alert that Niger may be moving towards a full-scale disaster declaration. The Government of Niger (GON) Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA) released the "Pre-Evaluation and Provisional Results of the Agricultural Season - 2009/2010," indicating a cereals harvest 28 percent lower than 2008. Moreover, the Office of the Prime Minister released the "Monthly Bulletin of Information on National Food Security" with an alert of impending problems. FEWSNET is reporting a food security alert, and notes that "production deficits will drive increased food insecurity in Niger in 2010." The FEWS-NET alert notes that food assistance needs are expected to be large and begin early. Post continues to receive alarming reports from the field about the seriousness of the food insecurity situation. End summary.

MDA Assessment: Cereals Production Down 28 Percent

¶2. (U) The MDA recently issued its assessment of the 2009 rain-fed agricultural production campaign. MDA's estimation is based on a sample of 9,195 households in 96 agricultural villages monitored throughout Niger. Based on this survey of observed yields, multiplied by an estimation of land planted, the 2009 gross rain-fed production of cereals is estimated at 3,575,315 tons. When compared to the 2008 harvest of 4,956,915 tons, the 2009 rain-fed cereals production is 27.87% less than that of 2008. In absolute terms, the 2009 cereals production is 1,381,600 tons less than the 2008 production. The report indicates an equally poor harvest of cowpeas (black-eyed peas), peanuts, and sesame. The main determinant of the final harvest and its reduction from last year was the late start, early conclusion, and frequent interruption of the rains.

2009 Production to Lag Consumption by 290k MT

¶3. (U) According to the assessment, the yields for the 2009 crop season are down 17.69% compared to 2008, and down 11.97% for millet and 27.04% for sorghum compared to an average of the last three

years. Less area was planted successfully, as seeds failed to germinate early in the season. According to MDA's report, the balance between production and the consumption requirement for an estimated population of 14,626,346 is a negative 289,985 MT. This is mitigated somewhat by stocks on hand and anticipated imports. One very important chart in the report indicates that within the seven regions of the country, 16 departments have produced modest surpluses, four seem to be in balance, and 16 are deficit with respect to needs. All departments of Diffa and Agadez are deficit, while four out of six in Tillaberi are negative.

Cereal Prices Higher than Five-Year Average

14. (U) The October 15 edition of the National Food Crisis Prevention and Management Mechanism monthly bulletin on food security and nutrition notes that following the new harvest, and imports from Benin and Nigeria, cereals supply improved in cereal markets in September. Thus cereals prices have decreased compared to their levels in August 2009. Millet is down minus 9%, maize 4%, and sorghum 6%. Compared to the average cereals price over the last five years, however, the current level of cereal prices remain 22% higher for millet, 18% for sorghum, and 26% for imported rice. This situation does not favor the vast majority of households with low purchasing power.

Nutrition Centers' Admissions Up; Migration High and Early

15. (U) The monthly bulletin reports that with respect to nutrition, the epidemiology systems registered an increase in admissions to nutrition centers. There were 18,693 admissions in August 2009 compared 7,615 admissions in August 2008. Eighty per cent of the new admissions are in the Maradi and Zinder regions. The October report concluded that there will be problems with respect to availability and access to cereals resulting from agriculture

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production and animal forage deficits in some of the agricultural and pastoral zones, the high levels of under-nutrition observed in some regions of the country, the agriculture production deficit in northern Nigeria, and locust attacks in Mauritania. Early recourse to survival/coping strategies, an increase in admission to health centers, and high levels of human and animal migration indicate that the situation is already deteriorating.

FEWSNET Calls Situation a "Food Security Alert"

16. (SBU) The FEWSNET report of October 27 is called a "Food Security Alert," and is headlined "Production Deficits will Drive Increased Food Insecurity in Niger in 2010." The full one-page alert with map is available at the FEWS.NET/Niger web site. The alert concludes by stating that "Even with reduced food production, food availability is expected to be sufficient through December 2009, and access will be facilitated by high demand for migrant labor in cities and border towns, strong incentives for off-season market gardening, favorable exchange rates for importing cereals from neighboring Nigeria, the arrival of irrigated rice harvests from the Niger River in November/December, and targeted interventions by the government and partners. Provided that a favorable economic climate persists, food insecurity will be moderate through December. Thereafter, declining food stocks, rising cereal prices, and falling livestock prices will reduce household purchasing power, causing moderate to high food insecurity, especially among agro pastoral and pastoral households, through August 2010. Food assistance needs are expected to be large, and to begin earlier than normal, yet government procurement plans are insufficient, and the WFP pipeline is limited. To address likely food deficits in 2010, affected areas need immediate assistance to encourage off-season production (i.e., agricultural inputs) as well as resources to rebuild community cereal and animal feed banks."

Comment

17. (SBU) None of the above three reports mentions a possible number or per cent of the population that might be in need of assistance. Only the FEWSNET report communicates any sense of urgency. The senior GON authorities have demonstrated persistent reluctance to

acknowledge the possibility of a crisis or an emergency, and have threatened others who may make that claim. UN agencies and NGOs are already manifesting extreme reticence. There are analysts close to or inside the GON who believe cereal production numbers are inflated. The vulnerability assessment now underway, however, might provide some parameters. The mission continues to get an increasing number of credible reports of a very serious situation developing across the country. Households with failed harvests and no assets find themselves unable to access what might be available locally. Some regional government officials are using the words "catastrophe" or "disaster." FEWSNET does go so far as to say food assistance needs are expected to be large. The Mission recommends early planning for a worst-case scenario until proven otherwise. Therefore, the Mission has determined that a disaster alert is appropriate at this time. End comment.

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